



# FASHION INTERNATIONAL

NEWS AND VIEWS OF THE INTERNATIONAL FASHION WORLD

AUGUST, 1989

## LOOKING FOR A REP ?

**W**hat can a rep do for you - how much do they charge - and how do you find the right one? The answers are not as straightforward as the questions.

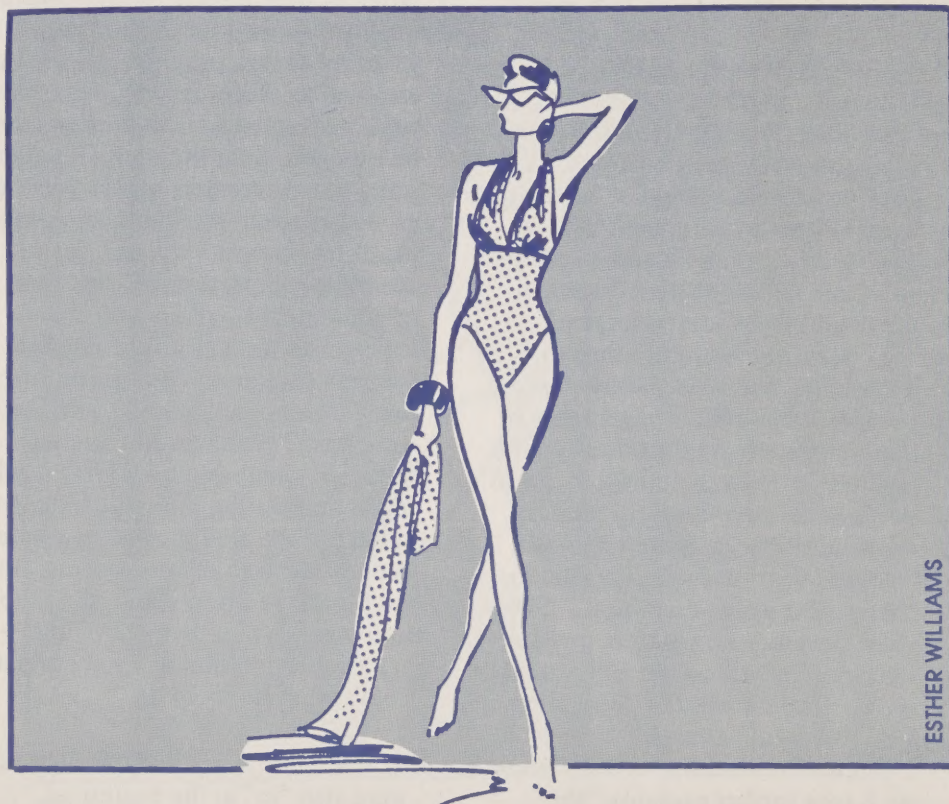
Reps run your business as if it were their own. Their primary function is to sell but, on a day-to-day basis, they will also handle most of the routine functions related to maintaining a fashion business. Reps agree that in order for them to sell a line, two basic requirements must be met by the designer: quality merchandise and timely shipments. If a rep is comfortable that these requirements will be met, the collection will be placed (along with others) into their showroom where it can be seen by retailers. The retailers will then order through the rep. To further promote sales, some reps will also act in a PR capacity or become involved with advertising. The scope of their services depends entirely on the philosophy of the individual rep. Although fees vary, a standard in the industry is 12-15% commission for RTW and accessories. This is based on total sales but, individual arrangements may be made if a designer wants to maintain house accounts. Additionally, some will ask for monthly draws and/or showroom fees.

Finding the right rep may be difficult. According to the reps, the referral system is the only method. Talking to buyers, other designers, or

## MAKING WAVES

**F**or Resort 1990 swimwear, designers take the plunge with collections that focus heavily on color and pattern. The dominant

silhouettes continue to be bandeau, tank, maillot, and high-waisted twist bikini. Increasing in popularity are the retro 50's skirted and underwire





## LOOKING FOR A REP

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even approaching an editor of a fashion publication that deals with reps, are three of the best sources. And, even among the reps themselves, referral networking is an accepted part of doing business. A good rep takes on a designer only if the collection complements the other collections sold in his showroom. If the rep is unable to promote the designer, the designer will be given the names of other reps who might make a better "match."

Designers should have a clear understanding of the variety of sales and management practices that exist within this 15-year-old segment of the fashion industry. Some companies are privately owned and operated, some are partly owned by one or more of the designers that they represent, while others may carry their own line of merchandise as well as promoting other lines. A rep does not require a license or special background to hang out a shingle, though most have had some background in the fashion industry. However, the most important aspect for a designer to consider is the rep's sales "formula." These formulas are vital to success and as individual as the personalities behind the firms.

At **SHOWROOM SEVEN**, Karen Erickson and Victoria Andreozzi have grown immensely in the four years they've been in business. With 28 designers (accessory and ready-to-wear), Victoria comments, "It's like having 28 children all going to Harvard, and we pay their tuition, help them with their homework, etc." This nurturing attitude seems to work. They see 10 to 20 new designers each week and have kept 90% of the designers that they had from the beginning. What do they look for in new designers? "Astrological signs are important," continues Victoria, "we're both Aquarians and tend to take people under our wings." Showroom Seven has a separate division for public relations and will not take on a collection without doing their PR. "We help to develop the designer's name by working with the press." As Karen further explains, "the

easiest thing is selling to the store, the store then has to be able to sell to their customers." Their philosophy? They don't think of themselves as aggressive or pushy. "It may be a slow growth," adds Victoria, "but it has deep roots, and it works."

Kay Judge considers herself one of the original reps, with her company **PERL, INC.** Having started her business 12 years ago, she has pioneered such designers as Diane Freis, and the Barboglios. When asked to describe her collections, Kay states, "I like wearable art. It's a look...it's not price. I run from \$10 to \$1500 wholesale." Kay's designers come from all over the world. Vivian Chan Shaw, just in from Australia, confers with Kay about her line: "Kay gives me direction in terms of colors and shapes. What suits Australia does not necessarily suit the U.S." Kay often visits the countries herself, having just returned from Yugoslavia, where she spent 14-hour days driving through the back hills, visiting knitting mills with designer Ljiljana. "It's like a partnership," she explains, "we contribute a great deal."

Norman Extract of **NORMAN STEPHEN ENTERPRISES** has a different way of doing things. Heading his own firm for the past nine years, he carries primarily Canadian and some European designers. "We work as their American home office," he explains, "handling not only their sales, but marketing, merchandising, as well as credit problems, shipping problems, custom brokers—we do everything importers do." In terms of marketing, Norman Stephen Enterprises designs a specific plan for each company. Mailing or advertising is done individually, and they work with PR companies and ad agencies when necessary. As for selling to the retailer, the same individual approach applies. "It's not hard to persuade a store to buy something, but there's an art to researching the store's needs and then merchandising a collection that will sell at retail. That's what we try to do."

Florence Napp and Celeste Lucci were also "in" at the beginning,

opening their showroom **FLORENCE & CELESTE** 14 years ago. They are strictly a "dress" showroom, from cocktail to ballgowns in the "better, better" market. Although they carry only dresses, they're careful not to take on similar accounts to avoid conflicts. "We were the first ones who did expensive clothes," comments Celeste, "before us it was strictly men handling inexpensive lines." They don't get involved with public relations, other than their mailings, but they suggest participating in co-op advertising with stores. "I personally think you get more mileage with co-op ads," remarks Celeste. Annemarie Gardin talks about her decision to go to Florence & Celeste 12 years ago; "I didn't want to deal with the administrative aspect of the business, making calls, dealing with buyers, all the details of sales. They take care of all that."

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Another dress house, **COMMOTION**, agrees with the philosophy of promoting only one category. Run by Darrel Griffiths and Herb Fogliano, they've been in business for 5 years. "We carry daytime, luncheon, cocktail, mother-of-the-bride and ballgowns, and eventually we'd like to create one-stop shopping for dresses," states Herb Fogliano. In an unusual approach to presenting their lines, Commotion keeps each collection in individual cabinets. "I want the clothes to speak for themselves," explains Herb. "Colors in here are quiet, furnishings sparse, so when a store comes in, they're looking at one thing at a time, and they don't get distracted."



Cosmo Sirchio and Don Friese of **SIRCHIO-FRIESE ASSOCIATES** have a wealth of experience behind them. Cosmo started the firm nine years ago, having been a designer himself in the 60's, and then working in sales for a number of years. "I wanted to give young designers a break," he says, "as I myself never had." Don joined the firm a year ago, after being president of Carolynne Roehm, Halston and Christian Dior. "We zero in on young designers but, it's fashion at a price." Describing their 12 designers, Don concludes, "It's really better merchandise." Their success is attributed to their reputations. "It's a word-of-mouth industry," says Don, "but you have to do a good job to get the customer to come back each season." Designers who have been with them and are doing well, con-

tinue to stay with them. "He knows he can make more money with us selling for him," Cosmo explains, "and it's something that gives us personal satisfaction, as well as a damn good income."

Anni Koltun of **KOLSEN APPAREL** has a style all her own. In business for nine years, she does not segment any particular market, but runs the gamut. "People like to think of my showroom as a candy store," exclaims Anni. Most important to Anni is that she, as a "working girl," like the collection, could afford it, and would want to wear it...and she does! As soon as her samples come in, she and her staff try everything on to verify size, fit, and coordination of separates. "How else are we supposed to sell it?" In a 4-color mailer, Anni herself models

each of her lines, relating the message to the retailer: "If it's good enough for me, it's good enough for your customer." In choosing the lines, Anni feels there must be an important "chemical" balance between herself and the designers. "We make a marriage," Anni explains.

Whether the balance is a "chemical" or "astrological," it must exist for both sides. The designer is clearly taking a calculated risk when he chooses someone to run his business. As for the reps, most agree that theirs is a "hazardous" profession. "We're between a rock and a hard place," states one rep. "If you don't sell the line well, it's the rep's fault and they leave you. If you sell it too well, they go off on their own."

## MAKING WAVES

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suits (ideal for the less than perfect figure).

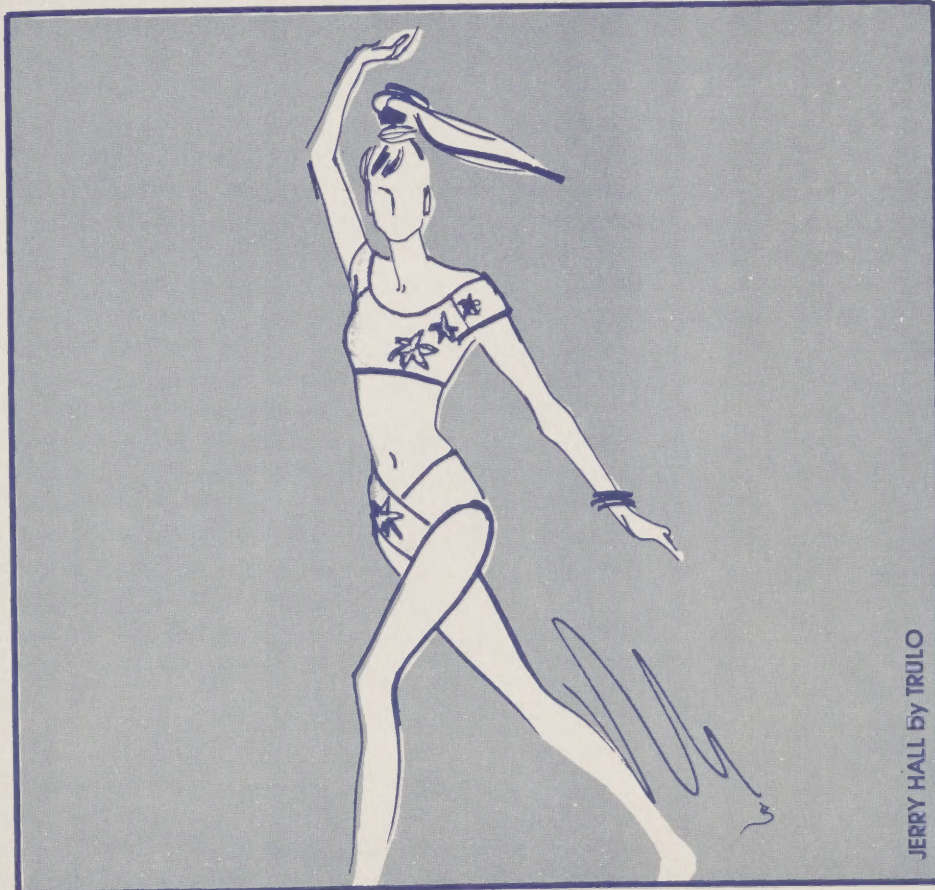
This season, instead of basic black, black combines with white in positive/negative patterns, polka dots (large and small), and stripes. Best of the best — **GOTTEx**'s dotted retro style halter with skirted brief, the lingerie skater in black and pink nylon/Lycra from **COLE OF CALIFORNIA**, and the **BILL BLASS** back-bowed "V" neck suit.

New for swimwear are animal, batik, and ethnic prints in earth tone shades of camel, brick, toast and green. **PIERRE CARDIN**'s bandeau maillot features the dramatic silhouette of a lion in black against a rich brown background. **RANDOLPH DUKE FOR PETTICORD** focuses his collection on water, fire, and sun. His "Solar Age" strapless skirt-front suit in Antron/Lycra features a stylized sun pattern and banding in black on a white ground. A drawstring big skirt cover-up in a woven jacquard jungle floral from **ANNE KLEIN SWIMWEAR** by **LOUIS DELL'OLIO** works with his line of sophisticated

solid suits. **ANNE COLE** brings back the triangle bikini in her khaki "mini-paw" group.

Inspired by the "Girl from Ipanema," tropical fruit, floral prints, and solids take center stage in vibrant (even

neon) shades of orange, red, lime, turquoise, purple, and fuchsia. **JUMPING JOY**'s lime/royal/burnt orange bikini, and **VIA BRAZIL**'s "V" wired rubberized dot bikini in fluorescent lime are aimed at the young and uninhibited. A



JERRY HALL by TRULO



complex use of color blocking in a shoulder padded "V" plunge maillot, and a 2-piece sarong wrapped sun-flower print, by **GIDEON OBERSON**, offers a sportswear effect. **OSCAR DE LA RENTA's** Caribbean inspired wild flower group features black and white orchids on a purple underwire maillot, and bikini. While **JANTZEN** combines two directional patterns in one terrific suit — a leaf and jungle paw print bandeau, shirred on one side. Notable additions to the swimsuit scene include three new lines, each introduced less than a year ago.

**DKNY:** DKNY presents only four swimsuit styles, three unbasic tanks, and a bikini in hot tomato, tangerine, or black cotton/Lycra for the serious swimmer. The DKNY logo is displayed on an eye-catching racer back with high-cut leg.

**JERRY HALL by TRULO:** This is the essence of sophistication, yet completely wearable. All the important trends are here, interpreted in Italian fabrics and designed in London. Outstanding is "Santa Fe," a southwestern inspired pattern, banding the front of a 2-piece skirted tank in cinnamon; the "Sea Creatures,"

starfish print on a scoop neck, cap sleeve 2-piece in bronze; and a Picasso print bandeau with matching sarong cover-up, all in nylon/Lycra.

**ESTHER WILLIAMS:** Offering something for everyone, from constructed and bandeau maillots, to updated 2-piece sheaths and skirted suits, these are all-American looks with a decidedly retro feel. Movie star glamour is provided by a black and white halter maillot in nylon/Lycra/Spandex; and a constructed maillot in a vivid purple print from the "Fractured Rose" group.

## DESIGNER FOCUS

### CLAUDIA SZERER

Prior to forming her own label, Columbian born designer, **CLAUDIA SZERER**, worked for Gene Ewing Bis in the U.S., and was an apprentice to Christian Lacroix. She debuts with a sterling Fall/Holiday '89/90 collection in 100% wool crepe and flannel, in shades of pumpkin, violet, rose petal, caper, carrot, and black. This is a finely tailored contemporary group, which focuses on career looks with an updated twist.

There is a decided emphasis on jackets, which top slim 25" skirts, high-waisted, narrow leg pants, palazzos or walking shorts (elegantly cuffed with a notched "V" at the front). A dapper tuxedo jacket in wool crepe vies for attention with an elongated, fluted shawl collar jacket that projects an aura of the French Revolution! While, a modified cropped jacket featuring unique details, in the form of silver teardrop adornments with a concave enamel finish, exudes a jewel-like feeling. Her fitted single-breasted gabardine jacket features

fringed sleeve trim. This same trim runs down the side of a matching pencil skirt. Soutache is another embellishment used throughout. As a trim, or as swirling buttons, this detailing adds textural interest to both her jackets and blouses. Blouses, in crepe back rayon/satin, range from an ivory version with jewel neck and French cuffs, and an ingenious built-in vest, to embroidered and dolman sleeve.

Wholesale prices: \$30 - \$95.  
c/o Jones & Jones Sales (212) 302-3633  
1466 Broadway New York, NY 10036

### LISA L.

This is the third season for talented newcomer Lisa Lebowitz in the accessories forum. At 16, she apprenticed with an artist and subsequently attended Washington University in St. Louis as a painting major. After spending six months in Italy printing and papermaking, her commercial career began as a freelancer with interior designers, handpainting fabrics and pillows. When she discovered that people were wearing her designs, she decided to go into production with her own handpainted and printed silk scarves. In 20" X 85" oblongs and 35" or 45" squares, her

designs are executed using an ancient Japanese technique.

"I stretch 25 feet of silk like a hammock in order to paint, instead of framing each piece individually." Whether handpainted or silk screened (the latter process is done in France), 9mm Chinese silk and silk chiffon is the backdrop for her individual styles. Her colors are sumptuously rich and almost three dimensional. Gold, orange and teal with muted brights and a plethora of jewel tones are printed in thematic designs representing wild animals, prehistoric dinosaurs, Italian landscapes, and abstract florals. Throughout, the "Tusk," a conscious representation of a brush stroke, is a recurring motif. An ingenious addition for Fall is the "Double Scarf," a versatile concept whereby one diagonal half of the design is career-oriented in a subdued geometric pattern—while the other half is a fun-loving, exoticly colored ethnic print! These are delicate accessories which make a strong fashion statement.

Wholesale prices: \$20-\$70  
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